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ABSTRACT

One of a number of reports of a study of the writing development of 14- to 16-year-old students, this booklet is divided into two parts. The first part uses five criteria to analyze what four secondary students learn from composing imaginary stories: (1) What resources are used in the setting or situation? (2) What kind of ordering is used? (3) What is the significance in the point of view? (4) What sort of readers does the writer assume? and (5) What actual or potential understanding of the uses of language could be pointed to as being significant? These criteria are then discussed as they apply to four stages of writing development, ranging from an oral model to a more mature literary model, and as they could be useful in clarifying the kinds of achievements teachers respond to as they read student compositions. The second part of the booklet, using two specific imaginary stories as examples, suggests that teachers can offer students prewriting assistance in assembling imaginative resources and making rhetorical choices, and postwriting or revising assistance in diagnosing causes of partial success or failure and suggesting effective strategies for improvement based on the student's stage of writing development. (AEA)

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ACHIEVEMENTS IN WRITING AT 16+

Paper 2. NARRATIVES BASED ON IMAGINED EXPERIENCE:

POSSIBLE STAGING POINTS AT 16+

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Stories in our lives

All of us go through life telling stories - sometimes compulsively! - based on moments in our own lives.. Often we tell the story to our own advantage. sometimes against ourselves. At an early age we learn how to heighten certain moments, to romanticise them and even, maybe, to fly off into fiction. We brag of our exploits, we boast of our fathers and mothers, and what we tell isn't altogether "true." It's all part of being human, though.

Telling stories about imaginary people seems at first a less regular, everyday activity. Admittedly, we probably all get a good start in childhood - being bears and lions and wild creatures; or being bus drivers, shop keepers, and the doctor coming to see mummy; or being cowboys on the trail, space travellers, and the builders of fortresses and dens. Don't we also keep up some of these imaginary worlds in the private fantasies of adolescence and adulthood? Whether we go on telling these stories, though, may well depend on our sub-cultural groups, their everyday expectations and habits. Telling jokes in a pub or stories around a campfire are two typical occasions for imaginary stories still to emerge in later life.

Yet for most adults, the sustained effort to construct imaginary stories - so characteristic of their childhood - seems to wither away. They do enter into imaginary worlds, through television, the cinema, the theatre and books, but in our culture the typical entry is as audience, not creators and participants. Perhaps the reason is not simply "shades of the prison house". Creating characters with their own lives in an imaginary world is not only difficult but demands sustained effort and time. We have only to observe young children at play to realise how much of both they invest.

There is one place within our culture where time can be made, and that is in school, within the English and Drama lessons. But then the question is: to what purpose?

Why imaginary stories?

When you are telling or writing stories based on personal experience, the central character is well known to you, and so are most of the supporting cast. The setting is familiar, and the plot is ready-made. Why, then, go to the trouble of imagining stories?

Inevitably personal experience is limited. We have curiosities or longings to imagine what might have happened, if our lives had taken a different turn.

And among the experiences that memory constantly draws us back to are some where we wish we had acted differently. Imagination is frequently under pressure from such feelings.

There are other things in our own lives we don't want to face up to, and certainly not to tell others. By imaginative projection we can sometimes explore them under the cloak of fiction. This can be done in earnest, but it can also be done through comedy. The laughter may hurt, but perhaps not as much.

There are other moments when our imaginations are captivated by worlds very different to ours - admiration, enchantment, fascination, seduction and even repulsion will draw us into them. They test possibilities in ourselves we hadn't dreamt of: but now we can, if we dare.

These are just some of the reasons for creating a new central character - or maybe a group of characters? - and for working to develop new settings and construct new plots. Right through to 16 many pupils are encouraged by their English teachers to do precisely that, presumably because the teacher has an inkling that there is scope here for special kinds of learning.

The purposes of this booklet

The first aim of this booklet is to consider in detail what four students are learning in a set of imaginary stories that tentatively suggest staging points in their development as writers. Naturally four stories won't tell us all there is to know about developments in this kind of writing. As it happens these four students have all chosen to focus on moments of inner experience in a central character; they could equally well have concentrated on action or relationship. Nevertheless we still think it well worth while taking a particular tendency in imaginary stories and looking in fine detail at the achievements represented at four clearly differentiated staging points.

As in our previous booklet on personal narratives (1), the discussion and analysis is exploratory. We expect, for example, that the criteria we are defining here may later need amendment in the light of further work and constructive criticism.

We have to admit that, in looking for pieces to represent characteristic achievements by writers over a range of 16+ grades, we have been disappointed to find how frequently the imaginary story is a failure. Although English

teachers have always encouraged such stories we have been led to wonder whether they are altogether aware of the significant differences for the writer when trying to create a story based on imaginary rather than personal experience. Quite often both kinds (and more) are grouped under the loose heading of "creative writing" (2). Even the London Writing Research group, despite their significant contribution to our understanding of "transactional writing" and "sense of audience," made no analysis of the distinction when they grouped both kinds of story under "spectator role" and the "poetic". (3) Without a clear sense of the additional demands (and opportunities) that imaginary stories raise, the teacher is less able to help the majority of pupils to develop their potential or to build up the repertoire they might be capable of.

The second task of this booklet, therefore, is to look closely at two more of these stories in order to analyse:

- a) further demands they make on the writer
(as compared with personal stories);
- b) new choices they open the way to;

providing the teacher understands the nature of these demands and choices, and the kinds of support and range of teaching strategies that can be drawn on.

We move next, then, to Part I, to consider some potential staging points and criteria that may be useful in clarifying the kinds of achievements teachers respond to as they read.

PART I

Four staging points?

The criteria we have used

When we reviewed the criteria we used for narratives based on personal experience, we found that two of them still broadly applied and the other two were also useful with amendment. However, we realised that at least one further criterion was essential. This arises from the fact that in creating the imaginary story, writers almost inevitably move beyond personal experience. The setting, the characters, the events (inner and outer)... may lie well outside the scenes, the people and the life they know. Thus, fidelity to an imagined world may be an important part of their achievement. This led us to formulate a fifth criterion: what resources is the writer using in setting and situation?

As for the two criteria that needed modification, these had been formulated in terms of narrators looking back over their personal lives. What we need to allow for in imaginary stories are the following:

- (i) A choice of narrator, whose viewpoint may or may not be endorsed by the author. Thus the comprehensiveness of viewpoint may be something shaped between narrator and author - especially when the former is treated humourously or ironically. This modifies our former question about the writer's "egocentricity".
- (ii) The invention of events, rather than their recovery from past experience. Thus, "reordering" no longer applies, and, as we shall see, the ordering of events in the story becomes an increasingly complex demand.

Our new criteria are listed below.

- (a) What resources are used in the setting or situation? Has the writer imaginatively realised setting, character, or events substantially beyond what might be drawn from personal experience? What drawing on imaginative resources and knowledge does that imply? (historical? geographical? mythical?...)

- (b) What kinds of ordering? How has the inventing, selecting and ordering of a pattern of events given focus and significance to the story? - how elementary or complex?
- (c) What significance in the point of view? Does the choice of the narrator (whether first or third person) create the opportunity for a significant entry into the imaginary world? What kind(s) of perspectives are offered - by narrator or author - on the participants and the events?
- (d) Is the writer unconsciously (rather than deliberately) assuming a reader who is already acquainted with the setting, the characters, or the events? How sophisticated are the demands on the reader? - what kinds of cues is the reader given?*
- (e) What actual or potential understanding of the uses of language could be pointed to as significant? In what ways is the writer beginning to move from a relatively restricted range of choices (in the use of vocabulary and structure), and to develop a sense of appropriate forms and tacit or conscious rhetorical strategies to evoke more complex textures of experience?

(1) An elementary example

Been Shot in the War

I was walking just around the camp when suddenly I fell down. I did not feel anything, and then I went to a sleep. Next I knew I was on a stretcher and soliders were looking at me and Saying, 'keep him warm and etc". I opened my eyes one of the soliders told that I had been shot.

I asked if, it was bad and one of them said, Yes it is bad you have been shot in the throat." The Nurse told me to take it easy because I could not talk yet. So when the Sergeant went, the nurse tidied my bed and she went out. I started to think about my wife and the other soldiers that were not lucky and I was. I felt cold inside as the room getting cold, and colder I thought what would have happened if I was dead. After awhile the doctor came and the nurse came in and the doctor told me that I was fine and he would have to take the bullet out and then maybe I can go home. I felt the pain in the neck as if something was stunging me. Then I went to sleep. I slept for a long time.

* * *

* The last sentence adds a focus we would now like to use in criteria for personal narratives too.

What resources used in setting and situation? The writer tells the story in a way that makes minimum demands on her knowledge - whether of wartime camps or military hospitals. A camp, a stretcher, a sergeant, a nurse...; these get a mention but are not elaborated. The actual focus is on the man who is injured - the protagonist - and especially on his thoughts as he lies alone in bed.

What kinds of ordering? The story is in the main a chain of external events. It falls into three parts which are clearly signalled:

I was walking...

Next I knew ...

After a while...

Within the second part there is a slight hiccup when the man who has been shot is shifted -without warning - from the stretcher to inside the hospital. Within the sequence of events there are elementary reports of conversation, comments on physical sensation and, more significantly, a moment of inner reflection:

I thought what would have happened if I was dead.

There is no rounding out at the end: this is an episode glimpsed for a moment.

What significance in the point of view? In the main the first person narrator reports the events in a matter-of-fact way. However, in the middle episode a significant moment is glimpsed by the writer: the possibility of death. Here the personal narrator is appropriate: the writer is moving beyond an ego-centric view of experience, reaching towards the unknown. Much is left implicit and undeveloped, but is there perhaps a suggestion of metaphoric force in "feeling cold inside" as the room grew colder?

What sort of readers? Some details of the setting are sketched in incidentally for the reader as the story unfolds. At two points, however, readers might become slightly confused. The transition from stretcher to hospital is rather abrupt, and on first hearing it sounds rather odd for the soldier to be told "I could not talk" when he has just asked a question. On second thoughts, the meaning could be that it would be dangerous for him to try to talk - but the reader cannot be sure of this.

What significant uses of language? For the most part the narrative is told in simple sentences, using central verbs (walk, knew, told, said, start, come) and where conjunctions are used they tend to be "and", or "so" and "then". There is just the beginning of an effort to evoke a moment more precisely:

suddenly I fell
something was stunging

Although speech is used it is quite elementary and without characterisation. There is an occasional struggle with Standard English patterns:

walking just around
to a sleep
as the room getting cold and colder
stunging

Are these EL2 problems, or dialect interference - or simply the result of a struggle to keep all systems going in written work?

SUMMING UP: The effort to construct a story, sketch in a setting, create a character and explore a significant (epiphanal) moment are clearly stretching this student's powers of imagination and language resources. It is an elementary story. Nevertheless, there is an attempt to make something, and the story is an achievement that can be enjoyed with the class provided it is read aloud well. Even if it is only a happy accident, the story allows a skilful reader to convey the sense of being in a daze, not registering much more than essentials, and not fully interpreting things as they happen.

Looking back at our example for a first staging point in personal narratives, we do notice one difference that may be significant, or may not. "The main organising principle relies 'less' heavily on spoken models." Could this be because in writing imaginary stories students unconsciously draw on models they have enjoyed in books (as well as film and television)?

(2) A further staging point

The Gypsies

The Kelly's were a large gypsy family who were always in trouble where ever they went. They would not stay in one place for more than a week, not because they did not want to but because they were forced to move on by the law or by land owners.

They lived in old type gypsy caravans which were pulled by horses they had had for a long time. For a living they did odd jobs for people where ever they stopped like sharpening knives and scissors on a machine which one of the older gypsies had made.

The younger children did not have very much education. Their parents tried to get the schools to educate them where ever they stopped, but for a week or more it just was not worth it.

Jerry, an eighteen year old gypsy, was fed up with life as a gypsy, he wanted to make some thing of his life, but he was very close to his father who was ill. and he thought that if he told his father he was going to leave, it would only make his father worse. He lay in his Bunk thinking about the life he could have, getting a job, going to night clubs and generally having a good time.

Then he compared it with his life as a gypsy, poor, isolated, and unwanted. He had always thought of having a proper house. He was fed up of traveling about.

Jerry thought and thought about leaving until he finally made up his mind he was going to leave. He would tell his father the following morning.

The next morning Jerry went to his father's caravan and walked in slowly uncertain of what he was going to say. His father lay there half awake, moaning and groaning as he wrestled with the blankets trying to get comfortable.

Jerry spoke nervously but came out with his thoughts straight away. He told him of the life he wanted to lead and that he was unhappy travelling around all the time.

His father looked at him and then smiled. Jerry knew that his father understood what he was saying. Then Jerry told his father that he would not leave until he was well again.

Jerry did not have to wait long for his father was well on the way to recovery.

The rest of the Gypsies were sad to here that Jerry was leaving them for they liked him. But Jerry's mind was made up he was going to leave at the end of the week.

Before the week had come round to when he was to leave, he started writing letters to landlords of flats, so he could get fixed up with a place to live before he left the caravan.

The final day came, Jerry was packed up ready to go, he had been fixed up with a flat, just outside Birmingham.

It was a sad sight for the gypsies to see Jerry leave, but most of all it was heartrending for Jerry to say goodbye to his father. But they agreed to keep in contact with each other, then Jerry parted.

The flat where Jerry was to live was a train ride away from where the caravans were.

Whilst on the train Jerry could not help thinking what would become of his life now that he was independent. But what ever became of him would surely be better than the life he would have led if he had stayed with the rest of the gypsies.

* * *

There is an additional interest in analysing this piece, as it happens to be by the same writer as "My First Date", the story chosen to represent the second staging point in narrative based on personal experience.

What resources used in setting and situation? There is a deliberate attempt to sketch the condition and life-style of the Kellys, "a large gypsy family". However, the knowledge drawn on is elementary, not to say stereotyped. Later in the story, the writing of letters to landlords seems to lie outside the writer's experience and is rather sketchily dealt with. The main focus of the story is not on these things, but on Jerry, his dreams and his relationship with his father (perhaps with a hint of fictionalising on the writer's personal experience?).

What kinds of ordering? By comparison, what this writer is attempting is a good deal more complex than the first staging point. The action covers several weeks: he deals with this by selecting two key moments and covering the interval between them (and preceding events) in a more summary and sketchy way. The story opens in a rather traditional and conventional mode by introducing the extended family and their situation. The focus then narrows to Jerry and his problem, stated first in general terms, and then at a particular moment:

He lay in his bunk, thinking about the life he could have...

Jerry's thoughts are elaborated till "he finally made up his mind". Then the narrative moves on:

The next morning Jerry went to his father's caravan...

This scene - the first key moment - is developed in some detail. After their agreement there is a time shift:

Jerry did not have to wait long...

The passing of time is suggested ("Before the week had come round to when he was to leave") and an intervening action - "writing letters to landlords" - is fitted in, rather as an afterthought. The story concludes:

The final day came...

The second key moment concerns the events of parting, and Jerry's reactions as the train speeds him on to a new life.

It is in keeping with this more complex structure that the writer constructs and shapes his story in paragraphs. These assist the reader - and possibly the writer - to maintain a clear sense of the pattern of events. (If there is a moment where that control breaks down, it is in the bridge between the two key scenes.)

What significance in the point of view? The writer chose a third person narrator, but as it happens it might equally well have used the first person, as - once the scene is set - the narration stays consistently close to Jerry's dreams and perceptions. Maybe the narrator is no better able than Jerry to distinguish dreams from reality (going to night clubs, getting a flat in the city). But he does have a sympathetic understanding for the father "as he wrestled with the blankets", and for the relationship of father and son at that moment. Again, there is something more than an egocentric perspective - though there is more of the dream world than of real conflict.

What sort of readers? On the whole the writer's instincts are right: he is aware of readers' needs. The setting is introduced, followed by Jerry - but rather as a detached explanation than as a felt part of the experience. The image of Jerry's father and his son's nervousness carries the reader much more deeply into the experience, we would say. We have noted the awkwardness of the afterthought about the letters - a moment when the reader's suspension of disbelief will probably break down.

What significant uses of language? Here is a writer who has competent control of a variety of structures, within the sentence and the paragraph. Nevertheless, we have the feeling that it is only in the first episode with his father that there is evidence of delicacy in the choice of language:

- walked in slowly uncertain of what he was going to say
- half awake, moaning and groaning as he wrestled with the blankets
trying to get comfortable
- spoke nervously but came out with his thoughts straight away.

There is an attempt here to use language to develop a more exact sense of Jerry's feelings, his father's condition, and the tension that may be there. When the father does respond - "His father looked at him and then smiled" - the simple directness is expressed in the language. In other words, this is a writer who can choose simple sentences to good effect, to convey the resolution of the young man's problem.

There is just a suspicion that - as in his personal narrative, "My First Date", - the writer is beginning to draw on literary turns of phrase:

- It was a sad sight for the gypsies
- Whilst on the train

However, while suggesting a kind of control this unconscious modelling does not seem to relate to a deeper penetration of the experience.

SUMMING UP: This writer is attempting to handle something more ambitious, a story in an alien setting which stretches over a longish period of time. This is probably why we have a sense of his potential, even if it is not realised throughout. It is quite an effort to get a story under way, ordered, plausible in setting and character, and to invent and sustain the plot and tidy up all the ends. So at this staging point one realises that the effort to get it together is an achievement, quite apart from imaginative exploration within its terms. It is not surprising, then, that he begins at "the beginning" - in a somewhat formulaic way. "The Kelly's were..." He may be helping himself out (getting things clearer in his mind's eye) rather than the reader. In terms of making a complex story he has begun to find a way through and to make it cohere.

If that was all the student had achieved, we wouldn't be satisfied. But he does find a moment of imaginative penetration. It is there he begins to recognise how hard it is for Jerry to decide "what he was going to say" and to look with concern at the older man's sickness. There is a momentary struggle with the egocentric dream - even though, by the end, you feel he has given in by reassuring himself (it "would surely be better").

A third staging point: a change in degree?

Born Blind

"Good morning!" came a voice from the darkness which surrounded me.

"This is your big day", A feminine voice followed.

My Heart began to beat harder and harder as I felt a pair of soft hands fumble at the bandages. Round and round went the bandages, would they ever end, I thought to myself. Then suddenly the Nurse's hands stopped. The bandages had gone. I lay still wondering whether to open my eyes after years of darkness. Should I leave the World of darkness which I have lived in for sixteen years of my life. Then as if by reaction my eye lids sprung open. The light was blurred and the faces of the Doctors circled around me. I closed my eyes again. Was I dreaming or was this the real thing. I opened my eyes once more, this time the faces were much clearer. I moved my head from side to side, then I became more daring and I moved my eyes from side to side. Screens surrounded my bed, they were a funny colour, but what colour, the only colour I knew was black. This colour was much brighter, it dazzled me at first but then my sight adjusted to the brightness. I sat up, I look at my hands and my bed, then the Doctor's faces, did I really look like them.

The Nurse held something in front of my face. Immediately it was in line with my head a face appeared in it.

"It's called a mirror, and thats your face." said the Nurse.

I grabbed the mirror and held it closer to my face. The face reflected in it was just as unusual as the screens around my bed. It was something I had never seen before. The Nurse told me to sleep for a while but it was impossible. I was thinking of all the things I would be able to see and do in this new World.

That afternoon I was put in a chair on wheels and was pushed through the hospital by a Nurse. There were many different people all sat up in bed, each one had a different face. Some had smooth, young faces whilst others were older and had wrinkled faces. They stared at me as if I was some kind of animal. I put my hands over my face so that I could not see them and they could not see me, but then I removed them for I knew I would have to get used to this situation. The Nurse reassured me as we carried on through endless corridors. As we were going down one corridor I observed a bright light shining through a transparent material in the wall, the Nurse told me this was called a window and that this was where my new life was to begin. For through this window I was to catch my first glimpse of the real outside World. The Nurse turned my wheelchair so that it faced the window, the light was now brighter than ever, familiar noises of car engines grew louder. Then I got a full view of the Hospital surroundings. It was amazing and yet it was weird. Their were so many different colours and objects, so many different noises. Each object had a noise of its own.

We carried on down the corridor and then came to two large glass doors. A man opened the door. Through it was another view, it was different from

the view out of the window. Another pair of doors led into the awaiting World. The doors swung open mechanically. The wind hit my face, the noises defined me. This was the real thing. I smiled, this was the happiest day of my life. A dog ran up to me and licked my hand, its wagging tail expressed its happiness. I expressed my happiness to the dog by stroking it in return. I looked at the Nurse who was smiling at me. I was really happy with my new life.

* * *

What resources used in setting and situation? The demands are limited to very elementary knowledge of a hospital, with no specialised knowledge of medical procedures etc. How a blind person perceives and how s/he first might register visual images are also not handled with any specialist insight.

What kinds of ordering? There are two basic episodes, the first introduced by "Good Morning", the second by "That afternoon". References to the blind person's previous experience are neatly encapsulated in incidental comments:

after years of darkness
lived in for sixteen years

The texture of the narrative is an interweaving of external "events" and inner thoughts and feelings. On this occasion the focus is on everyday, mundane micro-events for a sighted person:

- I became more daring and I moved my eyes from side to side
- I looked at my hands

In the first morning episode these are accompanied by second by second commentary; in the afternoon there is a blurred sweep with only a selection of key moments:

- as we were going down one corridor...a bright light
- then I got a full view
- then came to two large doors
- a dog ran up to me

What significance in the point of view? This is a first person narrative, and the focus is indeed on one person and an overwhelming inner experience. Other characters are mere presences, looking on. The narration is quite close to the stream of consciousness, with subtle shifts in the sensations, feelings and thoughts.

While the main experience is one of wonder and joy, there is a moment when the central character registers her (or his) own naivety in trying to protect herself from a new phenomenon - the staring eyes. However, we can't be quite sure whether they do see her as "some kind of animal", or whether this is merely a subjective impression. Similarly, when she "grabbed" the mirror, was that actually intended to acknowledge clumsy even rude, haste - or not? If it were, the narrator's critical self-consciousness would be a very sophisticated use of the first person - but we're not sure of the author's intent.

What sort of readers? Even at the opening, the author assumes a certain degree of sophistication in the reader: the "voice from the darkness" gives the impact of the sensation, but though the narrator "knows" whose the voice was, she delays telling the reader explicitly for a short time. The whole situation is built up incidentally in this way - a nice contrast with "The Gypsies".

Equally sophisticated, at the first mention of sound, the author gives the reader a nudge.

The light was now brighter than ever. Familiar noises
of car engines grew louder.

We are meant to realise that for the central character sound has been a major way of coping with life up to now. (There is a lapse, though, a moment later when the narrator remarks as if in wonder: "so many different noises.")

There is another interesting convention the writer uses. Her narrator "tells" the story as if it were past experience. But instead of using hindsight - or foreshadowing what she learnt - she tells her story as though it is actually unfolding. For example:

The Nurse held something in front of my face. Immediately
it was in line with my head a face appeared in it.
"It's called a mirror, and that's your face..."

Thus the reader is aware of what is happening ahead of the narrator, and that is what the author intends - and keeps a fluent control of.

What significant uses of language? Much of the language is simple, even plain, and yet its use is quite delicate throughout. Let us look at the variety of effects the writer achieves.

At the opening, where the central character is passive, the way the external action impinges on her from the darkness is nicely indicated:

- came a voice from the darkness (note the inversion)
- a feminine voice followed

You could say that this is only a simple variation on "said", but it is a significant variation.

A moment later, when the bandages have gone, the sensations are conveyed with considerable care:

- as if by reaction, my eyelids sprung open
- the light was blurred and the faces...circled around me

It is a crucial moment to register exactly, and one appreciates the effort the writer has made. The dramatic intensity of these moments is well expressed in the repetition that follows: "I moved my head from side to side" (looking at the faces that have become clearer); "then I became more daring and I moved my eyes from side to side" (with intense excitement in the contrastive word, "eyes").

In the final paragraph there is a beautifully simple moment expressing the new sense of relationship with all around her:

- I smiled...
- A dog ran up to me...its wagging tail expressed its happiness
- I expressed my happiness...by stroking it in return.
- I looked at the Nurse who was smiling at me.

Perhaps a more experienced writer would have ended here!

One problem for language is not solved - and perhaps this was the point where something more complex was needed. How to describe the contrast between the void (the black?) of blindness and the sudden illumination of sight (shapes, colours). This would be an immense challenge to a mature writer, admittedly. Would metaphor be the only way of conveying the impact? - the transformation?

SUMMING UP: This writer was asked to "describe vividly your sensations and emotions from the time when the bandages are removed." Thus she was encouraged to avoid some of the pitfalls of "The Gypsies". Nevertheless she was challenged in imagination to construct an extraordinary experience: the transformation from blindness to sight.

So far as plot is concerned she moves directly into the crucial action, and nicely elaborates in the afternoon "episode" by selecting three significant moments - the staring eyes, the open window, and the "awaiting World" outside. In the morning she focuses down on the finest detail (an eyelid moving by reaction); in the afternoon, though there is a broader sweep, each moment is imaginatively particularised. It is this ability that gives us a sense of her confident control as a writer.

We have mentioned the extreme problem of "colour", which is more than she can handle, and indicated the temporary lapse over "noise". Perhaps the imagination needs special help here, both to enter a blind person's world and to find the indirect, poetic means to express how sight changes it.

Parallels with mature writers

Reality

He peered over the landscape of rooftops and chimneys amid the early morning mist and smoke; the common house sparrow chattered on the roof as the first traffic moved in the street below.

He wished that he could be back home, he still called it home even after six months in the city. At this time in the morning he would be eating his porridge, that had been on the peat stove since his father had gone out to milk their few cows. His mother would be rocking gently in her chair, knitting away and every so often dipping into her bag for another colour of wool, regular as the clock that stood on the shelf over the fire. The smell of peat smoke would fill the room and it would be warm, though outside the wind howled and the bay was filled with white horses rushing at the beach and the rocks.

Here in the City the kitchen was a bare white room they shared with the family on the landing below. Here he still got his porridge though it only stood for ten minutes on the gas ring and the oats came out of a packet bought from a shop.

At 8 o'clock he ran down the four flights of stairs, wishing that there were no stairs as there had been at home; and he ran across the road between the cars to catch a bus, a double decker as always. Usually he went upstairs to get a different view of everything, there had only been single decked buses at home and even they only came once in the day.

Today he was going to pretend, pretend that he was home, that the bus was going along narrow roads across the heather or by the sea. It was no use, the people around him were all strangers and outside no hills and sea but tall buildings lining the streets and cars, lorries and buses all determinedly polluting the air. Always noise and only more noise at home there had been noise too, but it was the sound of the sea, the wind and sea birds pestering the

fishing boats.

At a quarter to nine he walked into school, only one small boy among so many others. He hated school. At home there had been twenty children in the village school aged between five and fifteen. When winter came and they were snowed up for weeks at a time, only those who lived in the village went to school, and at harvest time no-one at all went as even the Teacher joined in the harvesting. Now he was in a class of forty children all the same age as himself and he had to go to school five days a week, come rain or snow.

When they had first come to the City from the Island he had been excited, he had travelled in a train, he had seen double-decker buses for the first time and they had been held up at traffic lights, and the hotel they had stayed in at the beginning had fulfilled all his ideas of the city.

He remembered, when he was five, his uncle had sent him a book, full of pictures of the City, tall new buildings, flats and houses set in green parkland with trees, and new roads and motorways. He had poured for hours over the book dreaming of living in one of those houses amongst that green parkland, with running water and instant heat and light. Leaving behind the tedious peat cutting, the harvesting and the fetching and carrying of water from the pump.

All his friends had been so envious. They could listen avidly for hours to stories of townlife on the Mainland.

"When we get to the City," he had told them. "We're going to have a big house with a garden and trees, just like in those books." Trees were a rarity on the Island, no self-respecting tree could grow in the Winter winds. "There will be running water and electricity, electric-, light and we won't have a peat fire anymore, you just press a switch and you get a fire, in a box like thing." They all nodded, for a few houses on the Island had electricity. When it became too dark to see, everyone went to bed.

"My Maither tellt me that every house on the mainland has a telephone, are you going to have one?" Asked Tommy.

"Oh, yes," he agreed mentally added another item to his dream. "And my mother said I'll be going to a school where there are more children than all the people who live on this island." Their eyes opened with astonishment.

"I'd be afeared of going to a school with that many childer," to them the Island was their whole world. "Arn't you afeared?" asked his friend Aly.

Yes, he had been afraid when he first entered the school, he felt so insignificant and tiny. All the boys seemed large and horrible, and they had laughed at him with his homespun clothes and his thick dialect. None of them believed that he had lived in a single floored cottage with a well out at the back under the shadow of the hill and no light, such things were unknown to them.

His fantasy had ended abruptly when they first climbed the four flights of narrow stairs up to their new 'home', a two roomed tenement. No garden and trees, no carpet on the floor, a single electric light bulb dimly lighting the gloom and the only running water, was that coming through the roof. The water pipes only went up to the third floor and the only source of heat was the penny

slot gas fire.

Now, as he sat in his seat in the classroom, gazing at nothing, he dreamed of a small stone building that was schoolhouse and church with the rows of hard benches and desks and outside the continual roar of the sea and the wind. All this he had left behind for a fantasy of a city but the reality was nothing like his dream.

* * *

Again this piece has an additional interest; it is by the same student who wrote "Amsterdam Monday", the story chosen to represent a mature staging point in narrative based on personal experience.

What resources used in setting and situation? The story moves between a city tenement and an island croft, possibly in Scotland. The images are real not merely to the reader but to the boy, the central character. As he moves from one point to another through the morning, the city-scape is sketched in and he recalls the contrasting images of home. It's not that there is a great deal of specialised geographical observation required; rather, what's needed is a delicacy and an emotional appropriateness in the choice of images. It is too limiting to treat this as "setting" here: what is conveyed (and reflected) is a state of mind generated by the images of the present and the past. There is a certain "hubris" in that the writer cannot allow a nostalgic blurring of the past: those images too have to stand for "reality" - you couldn't have a more challenging theme!

What kinds of ordering? The author starts with two kinds of ordering: the elementary events of getting up and going to school, counterpointed with recollections from the island.

NOW

THEN

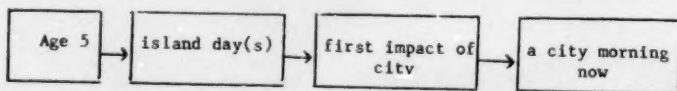
- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| a) peering over rooftops...early morning | : | back home, within the croft; the wind and the bay |
| b) the bare white kitchen | | |
| c) down the stairs; catching a double
decker | : | pretending the bus is in the country |
| d) walking into school | : | school, at home |
| back in the class of forty | | |

The contrasts are not simply formal, imposed by the narrator: they arise as

natural psychological shifts in the boy's mind.

This is complex enough but the writer moves on via the recent present (first coming to the city) to the distant past (when he was five). The theme of his dreams of the city carries the boy back to a past moment of bragging - realised in detail now - and forward again to his first entry into the city school. The story ends with a return to the present, "sat in his seat in the classroom", gazing, dreaming, and realising what has happened to him.

We can appreciate the full achievement, perhaps, if we imagine these events laid out according to the simpler narrative method of "The Gypsies", something like this:



What significance in the point of view? Once again there is a central character whose world we enter into through the sympathetic account of a third person narrator who is privy to his inner thoughts. The choice of the third person is important. You can easily test this by substituting "I" for "he" in the first two paragraphs. What the third person does is to help the writer to avoid a tone of sentimental nostalgia - even of self-indulgence. The third person is sympathetic, but can be more objective in what is recorded. There is just enough distancing.

When we come to the past fantasies about the city, the detached narrator can be ironically aware of their unreality - possibly before the boy is? When it comes to the dialogue, it is the narrator - we feel - who shapes and selects, giving Aly's question - "Arn't you afeared?" - the ring of a foreboding comment from the Chorus. "Yes, he had been afraid", on the other hand, seems to take us into a moment of realisation by the boy himself (as if in the first person). Certainly by the end we have a strong feeling that the story has enacted the boy's learning something about life - and not just the narrator.

What sort of reader? The writer seems to have in mind an experienced and mature reader, well able to cope with the psychological transitions and the incremental building of the image of "home". The reader is given every help in following the transitions:

- Here in the City...
- Today he was going to pretend
- At home there had been
- When they had first come to the city
- He remembered, when he was five...
- Now, as he sat in his seat in the classroom

But the reader has to be unusually alert. Every phrase has a significant place in the complex mosaic. These are nearer the demands of literature.

What significant uses of language? Perhaps the most significant quality in the language is its density. Let's look at the opening sentence: "peered" and "chattered", the two actions, are very precise, but in addition this one sentence compresses into a unified image "rooftops and chimneys...morning mist and smoke...house sparrows...(and) the first traffic".

At the same time, the simplicity of the next statement -

"He wished that he could be back home"

- reminds us that the writer is able to choose the appropriate complexity or simplicity for her purpose. Thus, with her, a short sentence can have a smouldering force. "He hated school". Or again, she can throw more weight on the negative by repetition and by omitting the verb: "No garden and trees, no carpet for the floor..."

The models the writer has in mind come from literature. But it is interesting to note that when she moves into speech she can pick up the style (the "and... and..." structure, for instance) and even attempt a form of Scottish dialect. The boy's hesitation on "electri - c, electric" uses a characteristic speech form to catch the unfamiliarity of the word at that moment (and similarly with "box-like thing").

SUMMING UP: In contrast with the writer of "The Gypsies", this student is actually investigating dreams and hopes. She doesn't make any concessions to "fantasy", but nor is her view of the past sentimentalised. She moves into the inner world of the central character (like the writer of "Born Blind"), but adds a new dimension - the movement between memory and the reality of the present, thus opening up the possibility of further psychological depth.

All this is allied to a greater sophistication in structuring the story.

The confident and naturalistic movement between present observations or thoughts and past memories makes a new economy and thematic coherence possible. Equally the writer is surprisingly able to move into recollected dialogue which captures the idiom of young boys and also takes the story on into a new realisation - "Yes, he had been afraid", a bold assumed transition. The dialogue also gives the past world a richer imaginative texture, we feel.

A retrospect on these tentative staging points

First you may have noticed that all these writers chose to pursue a central character through a moment of decision or illumination. In a sense, this is the simplest choice a writer can make - the imaginative effort goes without diversion into creating the thoughts, feelings and actions of that one person. By and large, other characters are subordinate, and very lightly sketched in and realised.

Given that choice to become an injured soldier, an eighteen year old gypsy, a blind person, a schoolboy who has moved from country to city - these four examples, we feel, are already sufficient to suggest what an enormous variety of things a young writer stands to learn, if s/he becomes interested in developing more complex forms of story telling. One can imagine months or years of effort that may be needed to move from stories similar to "Been shot in the War" towards stories with a confident evocation of inner perception and observation in "Born Blind". In structural terms there's a similar Odyssey between "The Gypsy" and "Reality".

Of course, we have no intention of implying that there is one linear progression in story telling, demonstrated by these four examples. Nevertheless, it will be interesting now to investigate how frequently features and developments of the kind we have described occur among other stories by 14 to 16 year olds.

Our second point is that among such stories we would definitely expect to find writers who had made a different choice; who had decided, for instance, to explore a crucial moment in the relationship between two people or among a group. Equally we would expect to find stories that are organised in a series of sections or chapters. There's a good deal more variety in imaginary story telling that will need to be investigated and understood. So we see this first set of staging points as a discussion of one facet of story telling and its development.

What concerns us next, however, is a rather different problem. All four of

these stories seem to us a kind of success. We would gladly read them with a class, and we can imagine individual students for whom each one would be a major achievement. What surprised us when we first came to select stories of this kind was that in two of the exemplar folders (representing Grades 5 and C), the stories chosen to represent the student's best achievements during the 5th year still seemed to us a kind of failure - and this was not an isolated instance; the same problem occurred when we considered other sets of folders used in trial markings.

Why, we began to ask ourselves, were stories based on imaginary experience - a key element in English teaching - so frequently not a success? Stories based on personal experience were so often more positive and confident in their achievements. Could we explain the additional difficulties that imaginary stories seemed to be causing?

PART II

New demands on the student

Writing an imaginary story involves us in new kinds of activity: assembling imaginative resources, making "rhetorical" choices and sometimes exploring new forms of language. In discussing the stages of development in the finished products in Part I, we have seen much evidence of these activities. What we now want to turn to is the process and ways the teacher can assist it.

If a student cannot cope with one or other of these new demands, the story will become a partial failure. But there are two crucial points where the teacher can help: first, as the imaginary world is being built up before the writing starts and second, when the first drafts are being discussed. At both stages we can think of five demands which the teacher should bear in mind. These are by no means necessarily to be worked on separately, but for the sake of analytic clarity we can list them as follows:

Assembling imaginative resources

1. Selecting from resources available: the simplest option, of course, is to draw entirely on your personal experience but to fictionalise it (varying the names and settings, perhaps). As soon as you move beyond that, the new demands start. You may well draw on experience that is immediately available, from television programmes you've been deeply involved in imaginatively, or from the other sources of "second order" experience - books, films, photographs, magazines, radio and personal anecdotes you have heard. But beyond a certain stage in the writer's development these may not be sufficient: it may be necessary to "research" into documentary and historical material, for example, or to explore specific "locations" - the geography of the story, as it were. (4)
2. Creating the story: we have already pointed out that in personal narratives the characters, the plot, the setting and even the "problem" or focus for the story are, in a sense, given. They already exist in memory, not necessarily as separate elements, but as a flux to be given shape. Although categories such as "character", "plot" etc. are to some degree analytic abstractions, they do remind us how many different aspects have to be worked on, and as it were "invented", as imaginative stories are created. If, as sometimes happens, setting or character are worked on separately,

then there is a further demand on the writer in the final draft: to fuse them back into the whole.

Making "rhetorical" choices

3. Choosing the point(s) of view: With a personal story the natural narrator is the hero(ine) of each private epic, "me". The personality of the narrator, the distinctive perspective on events, the sympathies and antipathies are all "mine". In imaginary stories, therefore, the simplest choice is to create a hero(ine) not unlike "me" and to tell the story through that personal narrator. But there are quite a range of alternative choices, if the developing writer has a mind, both in narrator and in characteristic point of view. (5)

To summarise for the moment, the narrator may withdraw from the narrative, leaving it effectively as drama, or may take it over entirely, making the narrative a stream of consciousness. Equally, the writer can assign any desired personality to the narrator (ironic, feckless... or humorous), and make the narrator central to the action, or a by-stander. Moving a step further away from the action, the narrator can become "impersonal", ending up as an omniscient onlooker, able also on occasion, to look over the shoulder of any of the characters and to interpret the story from their point of view.

While these appear at first glance to be "rhetorical" choices - as the Americans usefully call them - in effect they also imply varying, and frequently massive, imaginative demands on the writer. And yet there are students at 16 miraculously able to handle the more complex of these choices, seemingly without effort and for artistic ends.

4. Choosing the form of narration and structure: Through their reading, most young children seem to pick up a variety of forms for stories: diaries, log-books, letters, playlets, spoken monologues, running commentaries, tales told to an audience present in the story... (6) To judge by the course work assessment folders, students at 16 do not always seem to be encouraged to explore and develop this range of choices - each offering special opportunities for imaginative learning.

So far as structure is concerned, reading fiction can suggest an equally varied set of possibilities to the young writer. There are "short stories"

and stories in chapters - including "serials" with a climax each week. Within each of these there are choices to make about the organisation of time sequence (and flashback), and the use of multiple action (meanwhile, back at the ranch), for example.

None of these choices in form and structure is confined to imaginary narratives, we note: they are potentially valuable in narratives based on personal experience - but, again, do not seem to be explored at all fully. Yet their potential is far from negligible: each offers the writer possible ways of organising experience (real or imagined), and thus of making a range of discoveries about people and their lives.

5. Exploring new forms of language

Cutting across several, if not all, of these divisions is a fifth demand on the writer: to find appropriate forms of language. In an epic story, in science fiction adventure, in stories with characters from other countries or speaking local dialects... the writer's personal voice may not be enough. There are a range of styles and conventions to be found in the literary tradition, associated with such stories, which the writer will need to help in internalising, and which powerfully extend the imaginative range. (7)

During the secondary school course an English department needs to develop a deliberate policy to extend the range of imaginative resources that pupils can draw on in writing stories. Within each year there will be a range of strategies - perhaps including role play, discussion of visuals, study of a location, and inevitably, the discussion of imaginative fiction (especially short story) with a conscious focus on the way other writers create fictional worlds.

Concurrently teachers will be looking for the opportunity, especially as pupils discuss their first drafts, to draw their attention to alternative possibilities in the choice of narrator or structure. (We wonder, for example, if the writer of "The Gypsies" had discussed the possibility of starting his story at a different point.)

What is the writer learning to do?

In the remainder of the booklet we want to use two examples - one highly sophisticated, one more elementary - to study the five demands and their

significance for teaching. To begin with, what are the lessons we can learn from a highly accomplished writer - and what may s/he still stand to learn?

As it happens, the first student whose story we have selected, was asked to "describe a situation where somebody is forced by another person to do something against his will." He chose to give his story a historical setting, with the title "Death for Hannibal". Let us see what he is doing in the opening section.

* Twelve war-elephants made a very grand military sight. Originally Hannibal had mustered thirty-seven beasts, but many had succumbed, either to the treacherous passes of the Alps, or the javelins of the tribes that inhabited those perpetually wintered mountains. Even in the warm sun of Italy so akin to our Carthaginian one I felt the icy hands of coldness claw at me, as I recollected the memories of that march; the visions of men, their eyes held wide with terror, nostrils flared and mouth agape as they slipped and plummeted downwards to the waiting arms of death; the high pitched equine whinnying of horses suffering from hunger and exposure, and the hoarse shouts of cavalymen urging them on.

But during that march, a high grade of comradeship had been formed between the troops. So strong that the varied mercenaries that composed our army considered each other; Libyan regarded Gaul, and Spaniard respected Numidian. Bonds were also forged between man and animals, especially the huge elephants and their driver, not least between Metirius our Indian and his elephant whom we had nicknamed Hasdrubal in soldierly respect for our generals father. Metirius treated him as a brother.

We owed much to Hasdrubal. His stout feet and solid body had held fast many a time fate would have had us fall, and our trust was repaid. He was probably looking forward to the forthcoming battle as much as we were. The confidence in the forces was overwhelming. Previously we had been able to almost annihilate a Roman force by means of a carefully prepared ambush. This victory accounted for much Roman weaponry and armour being carried this morning as the two armies drew up for the combat.

* * *

The demands are obvious enough. Here is a situation far removed from personal experience. Elephants, Alpine passes, Carthaginian mercenaries from the whole of the western Mediterranean, Alpine tribes, the Roman enemy - these are all drawing on the student's historical knowledge. What is interesting is how much that knowledge is infused with imaginative life, partly in the detailed "memories of that march" across the Alps, partly in the confident mood of "this morning as the two armies drew up for the combat".

Giving the reader a sense of the context is particularly important in historical stories. In this case, though, the details of the setting and the recent

*For those who are interested to read the whole story, we give the full version as an Appendix.

hardships are not merely offered in a descriptive account; they form part of the "lived-through" experience of the narrator, his observations and recollections at this historical moment.

What is more, although the reader is aware that this is an "introduction", the prelude to a major event, we are already given a glimpse of a central figure in the action - Hasdrubal, the elephant - and the bond the crew feel with him. We have already a strong sense of the richness of resources available, and the writer's ability to shape a story so that it grips our attention (and interest) from the very first sentence. The demands of Resources and Story are already being met by a controlling imagination.

How does he do it? Perhaps we should stand back a moment and speculate about the kinds of foundations he is building on here. This could be a student who is deeply involved in setting up layouts of great battles, selecting the soldiers, painting the costumes, building the scenery. Equally, s/he could be an avid reader of historical fiction, with a special interest in the Roman world - conceivably even be studying the Latin version of the Carthaginian wars. Or again, this scene and the vivid panorama that follows as the armies prepare to do battle might draw inspiration from a film, paintings or drawings.

However, the writer hasn't stopped there. A crucial part of the achievement lies in internalising these, as if through the eyes of a person living through them. So here are some excellent clues for teaching.

To begin with the setting. Most pupils probably have some kind of vividly recollected scene, outside the run of normal experience - gathered from visits away from home, from television, magazines, or books that have been read to them with impact. What many of them will need is to learn how to draw on these individual images and build them into an imaginary world. Alternatively the teacher can help the group to build such a world by introducing them to resources of the same kind.

That approach helps with the setting and its demands, but it may not help with the story. It could result in a rather laboured introductory section (after the manner of "The Gypsies"?). Students may need a chance to work in role, to visualise the scene as a participant might. That leads to further questions: where do I want to begin my story? - how much of a setting do I want to sketch in? - have I found the right moment to start (as armies move into battle array and we feel the mounting tension?). Some of these ideas can be talked over,

others will need to be drafted and discussed with hindsight.

Of course, a lot of the answers will depend on the writer having a hunch where the crucial focus - the moments of realisation? - are going to come.

Let us move on in the story: to consider the significance of the writer's choices in point of view and structure. As the forces assemble for the battle, the narrator has two roles: from the vantage point of the howdah he surveys the array as an onlooker, while recurrently the focus returns to his role as a participant with his own elephant crew, to Hasdrubal, Metirius and their preparations for the battle. This sets up complex demands to convey multiple action: the broad canvas of the armies as they advance, and the small group of individuals within it. Again, the writer responds to these demands with considerable assurance. We pick up the story again as the section of multiple action ends and the focus narrows to the crew and the key event in which they are to become involved.

After a final dressing of lines, we advanced, cavalry trotting gently, grey giants lumbering stolidly, dusky Spaniards jogging alongside. Some distance away we could see the other wing manoueuering much the same as we were, and in the centre, skirmishers pressed forward to harry approaching maniples of infantry. Belebus and Hanno were grinning with the apprehension of the fight as the tower lurched from side to side as Hasdrubal placed his weight first on his right feet then on his left. He lifted up his trunk and trumpeted loudly, bringing a chorus from the other elephants. Metirius glanced over his shoulder at us and winked reassuringly. Already the Numidian cavalry were outflanking the Romans as they advanced to meet us. I looked back at the centre. The Roman infantry were methodically advancing forward and the skirmishers of both sides were exchanging missiles. We would have to make this encircling movement quickly before our infantry were caught in m  lee with superior Roman troops. But I focused my attention on our fight. A line of javelin men were in with their cavalry and they were making straight for us, but the Spaniards would deal with them. We must concentrate on the cavalry, but remember not to get so close as to disorder our own. The horses had been partly trained but closer than thirty paces and they would react like the Roman ones.

Hanno and Belebus were taking javelins out of their cases and I followed suite, feeling the balanced shaft in my hand, and grasping it in readiness. The Roman velites were running at us and the javelins of the Spaniards were hurled into the act. A multitude fell and then their javelins replied. Two thudded into the woodwork of the howdah, and a third caught Hasdrubal on the trunk. I felt him shiver as he bellowed out, trying to defy the stream of blood. Still we pressed on. Out of the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of the two opposing cavalry lines charge into each other like two opposing lions springing at each other. Now we were close enough, for the horses to catch the scent of elephant hide and they began to rear and snort, their riders trying desperately to retain their mounts. However I was swiftly brought back to our combat by a gargled shriek from Belebus who had received a javelin in

his neck. The Spaniards had not succeeded in widening the skirmishers and now they had surrounded Hasdrubal on three sides. We could not reply to their stream of missiles as a multitude of wounds appeared on Hasdrubal. In a moment he began to do what we feared: rampage. He turned to his left and careered madly across the field back towards his own lines. I saw a Spaniard hold up his arms in a feeble defence. Next, I saw him prostrate on the ground, motionless. Hanno and I were clinging to the howdah as we were bumped incessantly as the mortally wounded elephant dashed everywhere, thundering out his wrath and pain.

"The chisel Metirius!" I yelled above his trumpeting, "Use the chisel!" Metirius opened the bag and had it in his hand but then shouted back in reply over his shoulder -

"No! I can't, he's my friend!"

"Damn you use it, it's him or us!" I shouted again. He was wreaking chaos everywhere his maddened path took him.

"No! No! I can't I tell you!" Metirius uttered almost hysterically. In his eyes was a picture of turbid confusion as manifold confusions flashed before his mind. Another infantryman got in Hasdrubal's way. In his unquenched rage for humans, he tossed him aside with his bleeding trunk and crushed his victim triumphantly underfoot.

"Come on, man! See what he's doing! Use it!"

The sight of the trampled, bloody corpse jerked Metirius into reality. He hesitated for one more moment then with a cry of anguish he drove the tool home and Hasdrubal crumbled to the ground, in death for Hannibal.

* * *

The final role of the narrator is a complex one. His point of view is no longer detached: the quickening pace of the events, the elephant's final mad rampage, and the panic reactions of the crew have to be expressed through his voice. In many ways this is excellently done. "I felt him shiver as he bellowed out... a gargled shriek from Belebus...thundering out his wrath and pain..." We are powerfully led to the terrifying act that has to be carried through. But we wonder if the narrator is able to enter imaginatively into Metirius's inner state of feeling at that moment. Up to this point it is the narrator's state of mind that has been so well evoked. The question is: how comprehensive is the narrator's (and thus the writer's) empathy and understanding?

Maybe part of the writer's difficulty - as well as the enormous range of demands he has taken on - is that before this point he has not dwelt fully enough on Metirius as a person, and thus built up in imagination the quality of his relationship with the elephant.

How does the teacher respond? It is often going to happen that at a crucial moment in a story - especially in the latter part of one that has already made big demands - there is a relative failure of imagination. Even with a piece as accomplished as this, one can still see parts of it as a draft. If the teacher can respond in a collaborative way - as sympathetic critic rather than a marker - the student may still have the energy and interest to recover the imaginative penetration and reshape the passage constructively. It means that the teacher has to be steadily on the alert for possibilities for imaginative learning, awaiting further illumination.

Again, with a writer who is so confident, there is a question of rhetorical choice that might be worth raising. Is the choice of the personal narrator the most appropriate one here, if one really wants to get into the mind of Metirius? Who is the story to focus on - and what is the significant conflict in his mind? (It might be easier to focus on the present narrator's despair or anguish as he gives his friend the order.)

Finally, a word on the special demands on the language. In a historical story with an epic quality it is appropriate for the writer to convey a sense of the extra -ordinary through the language he chooses:

- "From the vantage point of our howdah..."
- "mounted on sturdy horses, strong in stature, resplendent in their purple tunics..."
- "their ostrich plumes... waving in the wind as does a cornfield."
- "far away on the left flank we could discern a pattern..."
- "A rumour had it that during training the young boys were not allowed to eat..."

There are echoes of the epic poem, a ceremoniousness in the language, as the armies draw up for battle. But there are shifts, especially in the dramatic climax, "Damn you use it, it's him or us!"

* * *

Let us turn to a writer at a more elementary staging point, again looking for positive lessons we can learn. Let us see what this writer is doing in the opening paragraphs.

My Escape

"Drop your weapons and put your hands on your head." I looked around there was no body except British Soldiers there. I had to surrender. Then as I was looking for more German Soldiers to come and help me I was hit on the back of my neck. when I woke up I was in a prison lying with my fellow German Soldiers on the floor. A few minutes later, two British Soldiers walked into the cell. They took me to a room with no lights in it. A officer sat behind a desk in one corner. He had lots of Medals on. He had great big moushtache and a small beard. I was tied up in a chair and there was a small table in front of me with a table lamp on it, the table lamp's bulb was pointing one way, it pointed towards my face.

The officer said to me if I do what they tell me to first time I would not be harmed at all. I was asked questiones and I had to answer all the questions and I did because, they would have got the answers out of me any way. After telling them what they wanted to know I was taken away from that dark room and escorted to the prison cell again.

* * *

One guesses that the resources behind this are television stories or films (and we shall be saying more about that later). There is a sketchy but definite sense of an imaginary world there. So far as creating the story is concerned, there are some bold and effective decisions (with a touch of cliché) - the shock opening, the entry to the interrogation room, the menace of the light bulb... A plot is beginning to be shaped. The point of view supports the impact of the opening - where the story works as action - but its opportunities to explore the inner tensions and fear in the interrogation (so neatly led up to) are actually ignored.

How can the teacher help? It won't be difficult, when the opening paragraph is read to the class, to give a sense of relative success. It might even be interesting to stop there and explore the listeners' expectations. The basic problem for this writer - and many like him - is to help him move on from graphic action to exploring the character from inside. As it happens, an interrogation is one of the simplest experiences to explore in class, or in a drama session: then the question is - What did it feel like? What did you go through? (There will be some pupils who can easily draw on recent encounters with dad, teachers, club leaders, too...!) If you can keep the student in role (lying in his cell later, muttering broken answers to a fellow prisoner?) it may help.

Before considering the wider problems, let us look at the remainder of the story.

The next morning they woke me up earlier than I usually did. We were given breakfast which consisted of one slice of bread and baked beans. Then we were transported to a large bumpy field, which was fenced all the way round. The field was to be digged and levelled. Some Soldiers had to carry stones out of the field and some digged. I was to carry out stones. The prison officer told me that there was more work on the other side of the sea. I went there, looked around for a few minutes and set to work. When I went out carrying stones I saw a River almost two or three yards away from the fence, there were two towers on which there four soldiers each. The towers were one on either side.

When we were transported back to the cells I asked my mate about the sea, he told me that across the sea was Germany. It was the only way to escape. Me and my friend wanted to cross the river, we wanted to be free again. We made a plan, the plan was to make a boat and then cut into small pieces and make joints on the pieces. We collected pieces of wood from that day onwards. Two months later we had a boat and no oars, five months since we came into prison we had the boat and the oars made but, we didn't know how to get out.

Then one day a thought came across my mind, it was that we take a piece of the boat a day and bury it in the field and one day we stay away from the field when the rest came back. We took the pieces of the boat and oars one each day untill it was all there. Then one day we had to throw the parts over the fence and bury ourselves in the ground which we did. When they went the field was quiet and the door was locked. Two hours later the Soldiers came off the towers and opened the door had another look at the field and left. After they were gone we came out and made our way over the fence. We joined the boat and oars and made our way across the sea as fast as we could.

We were filled with joy as we came onto dry land.

* * *

From the opening paragraph's strength this piece falls away in terms of imagined experience - ingenious as the odd plot idea may be (take a piece of the boat a day, and bury it in the field!). What is his problem? It is certainly not untypical.

First, consider the fictional models that are being drawn on; stories entitled "My Escape" naturally lead the student back to war films, television serials such as "Colditz", or books like "The Wooden Horse". In other words they have a full-length story in mind, spread over days, months or even years, and inevitably developed in chapters when you come to the written form. Inexperienced writers try to compress all of this into four paragraphs (extending, by the way, over what to this writer may be the marathon effort of two sides of A4). Even to plot that story could take a side of notes and a double period of hard thinking. Small wonder that the promise of the opening is not sustained.

Such writers depend on help from their teachers. "My Escape", right from the

start, can lead to a story in many episodes. What the teacher has to decide is whether a particular student can cope with that demand - or would feel it worth a shot. If so, the whole process of learning to plot an escape (which can naturally be discussed in collaboration) will have to come first. Then there's the decision, how to shape each episode. We are now into a story that will take several lessons, even weeks, to complete. There is a long effort to be sustained with the teacher's encouragement - and with regular feedback from the class. We doubt if a writer at this staging point will have much idea of the effort involved to keep the imagination going; but he might be tempted.

Alternatively, knowing the dangers of stories with titles like this, the teacher may encourage a focus on some epiphanal moment within it. In this case, "My Escape" becomes "My Capture"! The vital thing is for the teacher to be alert to the possibility of such a student standing a chance of learning by living through a crucial moment in imagination.

Conclusion

These are the lessons we personally derive from two stories. We imagine that any group of teachers sitting down to consider similar examples could use our suggestion of the five demands to diagnose causes of success and partial failure and then share their ideas on the effective strategies to help such writers in their classroom.

In considering how best to help individuals, it will naturally be valuable before coming to a decision to take into account the effective staging point of the writer. Here we hope that our five criteria questions, and the discussion of the four exemplar pieces, will help to clarify some of the possibilities in the road ahead for a given individual.

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Death for Hannibal

Twelve war-elephants made a very grand military sight. Originally Hannibal had mustered thirty-seven beasts, but many had succumbed, either to the treacherous passes of the Alps, or the javelins of the tribes that inhabited those perpetually wintered mountains. Even in the warm sun of Italy so akin to our Carthaginian one I felt the icy hands of coldness claw at me, as I recollected the memories of that march; the visions of men, their eyes held wide with terror, nostrils flared and mouth agape as they slipped and plummeted downwards to the waiting arms of death; the high pitched equine whinnying of horses suffering from hunger and exposure, and the hoarse shouts of cavalrymen urging them on.

But during that march, a high grade of comradeship had been formed between the troops. So strong that the varied mercenaries that composed our army considered each other; Libyan regarded Gaul, and Spaniard respected Numidian. Bonds were also forged between man and animals, especially the huge elephants and their driver, not least between Metirius our Indian and his elephant whom we had nicknamed Hasdrubal in soldierly respect for our generals father. Metirius treated him as a brother.

We owed much to Hasdrubal. His stout feet and solid body had held fast many a time fate would have had us fall, and our trust was repaid. He was probably looking forward to the forthcoming battle as much as we were. The confidence in the forces was overwhelming. Previously we had been able to almost annihilate a Roman force by means of a carefully prepared ambush. This victory accounted for much Roman weaponry and armour being carried this morning as the two armies drew up for the combat.

From the vantage point of our howdah we could view the whole battle line. On our right were the Noble Cavalry, the elite horsemen of Carthage, mounted on sturdy horses, strong in stature, resplendent in their purple tunics and bronze armour. Thrown out on the flank, like a swarm of bees, was a cloud of light horsemen, mostly Numidians, brilliant skirmishers riding tough little ponies with rawhide nooses serving for reins. Intermingled amongst our unit of elephant were a number of light troops, dark well-built Spaniards who frequently flashed their white teeth up at us out of their swarthy complexions in agreement of infallibility.

To our left were African close order infantry, many in Roman armour, their ostrich plumes on their heads waving in the wind as does a cornfield. Then came a centre composed of Gallic warlords and Spanish close-order troops, flanked by the Carthaginian "Sacred Band" wearing their beltless red tunics. Far away on the left flank we could discern a pattern of Liby-Phoenician heavy horse flanked and protected by light cavalry, most likely Spaniards and Gauls. Proceeding the centre infantry line was a mass of irregular Libyan and Numidian javelin skirmishers, among whom were scattered Balearic slingers; said to be the best marksmen around. A rumour had it that during training young boys

were not allowed to eat until they had hit their food with a slingshot. All we could see of the Roman line was very basic, a centre of heavy infantry, flanked by cavalry and covered by skirmishers.

Our unit of elephants each consisted of a crew of four; a mahout sitting on the back of the elephants neck, and three warriors riding in a howdah, firmly secured on the back, by ropes. We had richly decorated ourselves with captured Italian booty. The howdah was decorated with shields and we had made a canopy for it out of a Roman officers scarlet cloak, richly embroidered. Metirius had selected a stout mail shirt to protect himself, and my two other companions, Hanno and Belebus had similarly attired themselves, whilst I had acquired a fine crested helmet and a bronze breastplate. Three cases of javelins were slung over the howdah, providing plenty of fire power for us. Below, Metirius's left leg hung a bundle of javelins, in his hand he held a goad and near his right hung a leather bag. In this was a chisel and a mallet. Elephants had been known to run amok and it was intended that in the case of such an emergency the driver should break the spinal cord of the giant with this implement. This of course presupposed that Metirius himself was not the primary target.

I was checking the heads on the javelins when Hanno nudged me in the ribs and pointed towards a fast approaching cloud of dust. Soon we could make out a figure, armour flashing in the sunlight, red cloak streaming backwards like a billowing fire, spurring on a foam-flecked white steed. It was Hannibal Barca "scourge of the Romans", the general who would give us victory. He reined his horse in and dismounted; for horses cannot endure the smell of elephants unless specially trained. Get them too close and they rear and become uncontrollable. The general walked briskly up to Hasdrubal, patted him, he had become his favourite elephant too and ascended into our cramped howdah, from where he began to relate orders: Both cavalry wings, we were told had been ordered to advance and drive off the numerically inferior Roman cavalry, and then turn upon the rear of the infantry; a double envelopment. Our role, as we had expected was to disorganise the enemy's horses.

After a final dressing of lines, we advanced, cavalry trotting gently, grey giants lumbering stolidly, dusky Spaniards jogging alongside. Some distance away we could see the other wing manouvering much the same as we were, and in the centre, skirmishers pressed forward to harry approaching maniples of infantry. Belebus and Hanno were grinning with the apprehension of the fight as the tower lurched from side to side as Hasdrubal placed his weight first on his right feet then on his left. He lifted up his trunk and trumpeted loudly, bringing a chorus from the other elephants. Metirius glanced over his shoulder at us and winked reassuringly. Already the Numidian cavalry were outflanking the Romans as they advanced to meet us. I looked back at the centre. The Roman infantry were methodically advancing forward and the skirmishers of both sides were exchanging missiles. We would have to make this encircling movement quickly before our infantry were caught in mēlee with superior Roman troops. But I focused my attention on our fight. A line of javelin men were in with their cavalry and they were making straight for us, but the Spaniards would deal with them. We must concentrate on the cavalry, but remember not to get so close as to disorder our own. The horses had been partly trained but closer than thirty paces and they would react like the Roman ones.

Hanno and Belebus were taking javelins out of their cases and I followed suite, feeling the balanced shaft in my hand, and grasping it in readiness. The Roman velites were running at us and the javelins of the Spaniards were hurled into the act. A multitude fell and then their javelins replied. Two thudded into the woodwork of the howdah, and a third caught Hasdrubal on the trunk. I felt him shiver as he bellowed out, trying to defy the stream of blood. Still we pressed on. Out of the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of the two opposing cavalry lines charge into each other like two opposing lions springing at each other. Now we were close enough, for the horses to catch the scent of elephant hide and they began to rear and snort, their riders trying desperately to retain their mounts. However I was swiftly brought back to our combat by a gargled shriek from Belebus who had received a javelin in his neck. The Spaniards had not succeeded in widening the skirmishers and now they had surrounded Hasdrubal on three sides. We could not reply to their stream of missiles as a multitude of wounds appeared on Hasdrubal. In a moment he began to do what we feared: rampage. He turned to his left and careered madly across the field back towards his own lines. I saw a Spaniard hold up his arms in a feeble defence. Next, I saw him prostrate on the ground, motionless. Hanno and I were clinging to the howdah as we were bumped incessantly as the mortally wounded elephant dashed everywhere, thundering out his wrath and pain.

"The chisel Metirius!" I yelled above his trumpeting, "Use the chisel!" Metirius opened the bag and had it in his hand but then shouted back in reply over his shoulder -

"No! I can't, he's my friend!"

"Damn you use it, it's him or us!" I shouted again. He was wreaking chaos everywhere his maddened path took him.

"No! No! I can't I tell you!" Metirius uttered almost hysterically. In his eyes was a picture of turbid confusion as manifold confusions flashed before his mind. Another infantryman got in Hasdrubal's way. In his unquenched rage for humans, he tossed him aside with his bleeding trunk and crushed his victim triumphantly underfoot.

"Come on, man! See what he's doing! Use it!"

The sight of the trampled, bloody corpse jerked Metirius into reality. He hesitated for one more moment then with a cry of anguish he drove the tool home and Hasdrubal crumbled to the ground, in death for Hannibal.

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